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By David Levinsky Staff writer

The first public poll of New Jersey's closely watched 3rd Congressional District is out, and it places Democrat Aimee Belgard and Republican Tom MacArthur in a statistical tie.

The early poll by the Stockton Polling Institute found MacArthur and Belgard both have 42.2 percent support among those surveyed. Another 12.8 percent were undecided, and 2.9 percent said they planned to back someone else, "nobody" or refused to answer.

The results are based on live phone interviews of 606 likely voters contacted by the Stockton Polling Institute, of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy, between Friday and Sunday. It has a margin of error of 4 percent.

Belgard and MacArthur are vying for the open seat of Rep. Jon Runyan, who announced in November that he would retire at the end of his second term.

The district is made up of almost all of Burlington County and a large portion of neighboring Ocean County. Traditionally, the seat has been held by Republicans, but Democrat John Adler won it in 2008, and Democrats earlier on labeled it one of their best pickup opportunities of this election cycle.

Stockton's poll confirms the race is still a toss-up for both sides and likely will continue to attract national attention.

"A congressional race this close will continue to draw national attention to New Jersey," Hughes Center director Daniel J. Douglas said Monday. "The candidates will be fighting over



Nancy Rokos

On the porch of the Alice Paul Institute in Mount Laurel, Burlington County Freeholder Aimee Belgard (D) of Edgewater Park answers questions from the press after announcing her campaign for U.S. Congress.



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a relatively small number of undecided voters from now to Election Day.”

A recent internal poll commissioned by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee also showed the race was razor tight, but with MacArthur leading Belgard 46 to 43 percent, and within the 4.9 percent margin of error. The poll results were published Monday by CQ Roll Call.

Although the race is statistically a dead heat, the Stockton poll found MacArthur, a retired insurance CEO and former mayor of Randolph, Mo